

80005

January 10, 1980

A REPORT ON THE
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

by The Rev. Richard H. Schmidt

Editor of Mountain Dayspring, Diocese of West Virginia

I had an opportunity to attend and participate in the December meeting of the Executive Council, a body of 44 bishops, priests and lay people who act as a kind of vestry for the national Episcopal Church. This was the first meeting of the Executive Council which was elected at last fall's General Convention. The Council will meet three times each year until a new Council is elected at the 1982 Convention.

I was surprised to find that I felt completely at home with the Executive Council almost from the outset. This was due to the numerous similarities between the Executive Council on the one hand, and the vestry of a typical West Virginia congregation and our Diocesan Council on the other. For example:

- The Executive Council meets in Greenwich, Connecticut at Seabury House, an elegant, rambling old mansion which is strongly reminiscent of West Virginia's conference center at Sandscrest. Seabury House is, however, about three times larger than Sandscrest.
- The Executive Council conducts its affairs in the same way that our Diocesan Council and many of our vestries operate. The first day is spent primarily in committee meetings, followed by a couple of days of plenary sessions at which committee recommendations are presented to the full Council and voted upon.
- Presiding Bishop John M. Allin and Bishop Robert P. Atkinson of West Virginia seem to have learned their leadership skills from the same teacher. Both bishops lead in a non-directive manner, although it was my impression that Bishop Allin exercises considerable influence behind the scenes. In the case of both bishops, this open style of leadership instills a sense of integrity and authenticity to the Council as a whole and to its various committees and departments.

- Apart from the wide variety of accents with which they spoke, members of the Executive Council might easily have been mistaken for West Virginia Episcopalians. They are devoted men and women of the Church who are seeking to discern and follow the Lord's will for the Church, just as our vestries and Diocesan Council seek to do in West Virginia.

- Although the dollar figures are larger, the Executive Council experiences the same problems with money that we experience in West Virginia. Our vestries often struggle at the end of the year when many parishioners fall behind in their pledge payments; the Diocesan Council struggles at the end of the year when many congregations fall behind in payment of their Missionary Apportionments; the Executive Council struggles at year end when many dioceses fall behind. But everything usually has been worked out by the first week in January.

- The Executive Council operates on a very tight budget -- as is also true of our Diocese and many congregations in West Virginia.

I will not discuss the topics which the Executive Council voted upon (See The Episcopalian). But I did learn a great deal about the national church's attitudes in my full day of meeting with the Communication Committee, one of the six Standing Committees of the Executive Council. The Communication Committee is as concerned with receiving communication and views from the various dioceses as it is with communicating news from the national church to the dioceses. I found this attitude most reassuring. The Communication Committee spent time brain-storming on the purpose of communications in the Church and new ways of doing its work. As a guest of the Committee, I was encouraged to participate actively in these discussions.

I returned from the Executive Council with a far stronger sense of kinship with the national church leadership than I had ever felt before. I became even more aware than before of the importance of good communications in the church. Good communications at the local level will draw into the life of the congregation individuals who feel isolated; good communications at the diocesan level will draw into the life of the diocese congregations which feel isolated; and good communications at the national level will do the same for dioceses which feel isolated. This communication must be in both directions if the church is to function as the one, indivisible Body of Jesus Christ.

#

